

In The Shelter of His Arms

A Labor of Love

Missionaries Build Homes and Rebuild Lives in Mexico

Story by Katrina Lopez
Photos by Alan Thompson

Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

Psalm 127:1

Two Arizona Calvary Chapels, CC Tucson and CC Sierra Vista, ministered together in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico, last November, when nearly 200 volunteers built three homes and a Sunday school building in three days. Puerto Peñasco is home to about 42,000 residents, but because it is a seaside town only a couple hours south of Arizona, it is a popular beach getaway destination. On its dusty outskirts thousands live in poverty in makeshift shacks.

Wooden pallets, nailed and wired together, made up the walls for what Jorge Villegas and his family had called home in Puerto Peñasco. Cardboard boxes, cut open and nailed to the inside, provided little protection from wind and dirt blowing through the pallet slats. There was no flooring, only sand. A large, orange tarp was their roof.

The Villegases' poverty was due in part to Jorge's drug addiction, which began when he was only 6 years old in Nogales, Mexico. Jorge's life had been layered with sorrows. At age 6, he was abandoned by his father and taken in by a grandmother who practiced witchcraft. Growing up, he watched boyhood friends die as they tried to make a living. As a teenager, he had several brushes with death while crossing the U.S. border and was involved in drunken brawls and gun fights. Jorge joined the Mexican army at 18 and was consumed by drugs and alcohol.



CC Tucson and Sierra Vista team members join the Sunday school class as they listen to verses from the book of Psalms.

Burdened by guilt for his addiction and failures, Jorge left his wife and two daughters in Nogales and fled to Puerto Peñasco. A

month later, he contacted them, promising to change. Angelica and their two daughters, Daniela and Christian soon joined him.

"When they came [to Puerto Peñasco], I lasted 15 days without drinking and doing drugs. At work one day, I saw my boss



Left to right: Doug Blaser, Joe White, Pastor Carlos Adame of Iglesia de Dios, Jim Barnes, and Bob Mangon pray.

reading a Bible, and I asked him if he was a brother. He invited me to church," Jorge recalled. He went to church and wanted to change, but did not turn to Christ yet.

At rock bottom in February 2006, Jorge spent \$400 on drugs in one day—a substantial amount of money for his impoverished family. "I started to think about all the drugs, alcohol, anger, hurt, and pain in my life and I cried out to God," said Jorge. "So that night I gave my life to God. I said, 'God, I believe in You. ... I need You. Change me.'"

Hungry and alone a few days later, Jorge walked into a Christian church where he was welcomed and fed. He recalled, "After that day, I started to see the goodness of God."

A Changed Life

His wife began to witness a real change in Jorge. In April he volunteered to help the CC Tucson team build a new home for his neighbor, a single mother of six. When the



The CC Tucson and Sierra Vista team construct the frame of the Sunday school next to Iglesia de Dios.



Angelica cooks a meal in her old home with daughter Daniela. One big room serves as both the bedroom and kitchen.



The Villegas family: Angelica, 24; Daniela, 2; Christian, 5; and Jorge, 22; in front of their old home.



Pastor of the Spanish Chapel at CC Tucson, Marvin Temple, speaks with Jorge and Angelica about their new home.

CC Tucson team left after a weekend of building, they gave their tools to Jorge to use in his construction work.

To his surprise, the team built Jorge's family a home during their next visit in November. Now Jorge owns a 22-foot by 11-foot home complete with a cement slab floor, stucco walls, sliding glass windows, and a solid roof.

Next to Jorge's house is La Iglesia de Dios, a Christian church built by a CC Tucson team

during a previous trip. This time the CC Tucson and CC Sierra Vista teams added a Sunday school building. Moments after the building was finished, 34 children from the city and surrounding neighborhood began their first Sunday school class, reciting Psalm 146:7: "Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners."

Pastor Carlos Adame of La Iglesia testified of God's faithfulness, "I have been praying for a building. This is a growing community,

and we want to reach the children." Believers there hope to buy more land surrounding the church and bus in more families for services.

Further down the sandy lane from Jorge lives Alma Olvera and her three young children. Alma came to Puerto Peñasco in order to find work to support her children through school. Worries about her children's safety had plagued Alma, but with a joyful smile and keys in hand, she walked into her new house for the first time after the team finished their work.



At sunset hundreds of people return to the Amor Ministries campground site outside the city for a time of fellowship and worship.

In the same neighborhood, Luis, Rosa, and their two sons lived in a one-bedroom home with an unstable roof. They lived without electricity, drinkable water, telephone, propane, stove, car, or refrigerator. Rosa and Luis had sacrificed home improvements in order to send their son to school. The team worked on their home as well.

Irma Arvayo of CC Tucson said, "I got to share the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 with Rosa. She was in tears because God spoke to her directly ... Rosa read it out loud to me, and at one point, she couldn't utter any words because she was overwhelmed with His love." Irma added, "I desire to share God's truth and love with others because someone shared it with me through their actions—not only with their words."

As construction teams framed walls with handsaws and hammers, evangelistic teams traveled door-to-door sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and providing Bibles in Spanish. Serving the community in tangible ways opens the door to share the Gospel with people who are culturally familiar with religion but unfamiliar with the personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Servanthood

Several young believers who came on the trip learned about servanthood and thankfulness. Jennie Dickey, 17, has been there three times and helped build Jorge's home. She said, "Coming here reminds me to be thankful to God for what I have."

Joe White of CC Sierra Vista has been to Puerto Peñasco twice. "The [new] homes

really stood out ... they have a sense of pride with what they have been blessed with. They had painted their houses, cleaned up the trash in their areas," he said. "We are coming there and showing Christ through words but also actions by building them a house. And we're giving them hope, which a lot of these people don't have."

"We don't go down there just to build a house," said Joe. "We go down there to share Christ with these people, and building a house is just a product of the trip." CC Tucson and CC Sierra Vista plan to return to Puerto Peñasco twice a year to strengthen and deepen relationships, to bless the community, and be the hands and feet of Jesus.

"Now I have my family, my land, my house, and God gets the glory," Jorge exclaimed. "The Lord is our only faithful friend. I believe in His promises, and I want to tell everyone what God has done in my life." ↵

Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. Isaiah 58:12

Working with Amor Ministries, CC Tucson organizes teams of volunteers twice a year to build homes and churches for families in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico.



Mexico borders several U.S. states.

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Alma Olvera receives the keys to her new home by Steve Wright of CC Tucson. Wright led the team in the construction of Alma's home.